

Kolkata: Contrary to popular belief that madrassas are schools for fundamentalist Islamic teaching, madrassas in West Bengal are attracting an increasing number of Hindu students with their shift in focus from Islamist education to science and technology. Hindu students now outnumber Muslims in four madrassas of the state.

These include Kasba MM High Madrassa in Uttar Dinajpur district, Ekmukha Safiabad High Madrassa in Cooch Behar district, Orgram Chatuspalli High Madrassa at Burdwan district and Chandrakona Islamia High Madrassa at West Midnapore district.

"The percentage of Hindu students vary from 5

7

percent to

64

percent in these institutes,"

Sohrab Hussain, West Bengal Board of Madrasah Education President, told Indian news portal sify.com on Tuesday, January 20.

He said 618 out of the 1,077 students in Kasba, 554

out of

868

students at Orgram,

201

out of

312

at Chandrakona and

290

out of total

480

students at Ekmukha are Hindus.

Hussain refuted some of the usual stereotypes about Islamic schools.

"It's a misconception that our students only learn Islam-related subjects at madrasahs," he maintained.

"Time is changing and so are we. Now, we lay more stress on science and

technology than religion."

The madrasahs are equipped with the new tools of modern education.

"Already 42 madrasahs have computer laboratories; we will increase the number by another 100 labs in 2009," said Hussain.

"Over 100 madrasahs offer vocational training in not only tailoring but even mobile applications technology."

There are 506 madrasahs in West Bengal and nearly 52 others will be established by the end of 2009.

Nearly 17 percent of the students and **11** percent of the teachers in these Islamic schools are non-Muslims.

Credible

The official noted that madrasahs have managed to gain the confidence of students and guardians too.

"Mostly first generation learners from backward classes come to study here as they know they won't be looked down upon," Hussain said.

"All students are treated equally... there is no religious bias in the madrassas. Even the syllabus of the madrassas are no different from the Madhyamik - the state secondary examinations.

"The only difference is our students

have to sit for a 100-mark extra paper on Arabic and Islamic studies, which in a way is good for Hindu students too. They can learn a new language at the same time," Hussain said.

Golum Mustafa, the headmaster of Kasba madrasah, agrees.

"If anyone asks me why Hindu students study at madrasahs, I ask them, 'Why not?' Be it school or madrasah - they are meant for imparting education," he said.

"There are many Hindu students who passed out from Kasba and are well-established in life."

Bibhas Chandra Ghorui, a Hindu assistant teacher, notes that affordable fees further attracted more students.

"There are seven schools within one km of this madrasah. But still people send their wards here, mostly because of affordability," he said.

"One has to pay Rs.375 at general schools while the fees at the madrasah is only Rs.110," he explained.

"As for religious tolerance, if a Muslim student can study Baishnav Padavali - a Hindu religious hymns - then why can't a Hindu student study Islam or Arabic?"

Madrasa certificates will now be CBSE equivalent

((New Delhi: In a move that goes a long way in mainstreaming Madrasa students across the country and help clear their way to higher education, the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry is all set to grant madrasa certificates equivalence to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).

A key recommendation of the Sachar committee — and also on the PM's 15-point programme for minorities — a special panel set up by the Ministry recently recommended that in states where madrasa certificates are recognized as equivalent to secondary and senior secondary level, these should also be granted equivalence by the CBSE.

The notification is expected soon and will benefit some 7000 madrasahs and 3.5 lakh students in seven states that have madrasah boards: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Assam and West Bengal. This will also apply to madrasah certificated already issued.

In states without a madrasah board, the panel has

recommended that students should have an option to approach a madrasa board in a neighbouring state to avail of the CBSE equivalence. - indi
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